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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: PARTIAL CABINET RESHUFFLE

SUMMARY

11. (U) On October 30, the Ethiopian parliament approved the appointment of nine ministers presented by Prime Minister Meles. Five of the nine ministers were members of the former cabinet and four are newcomers. Four of the outgoing ministers remain without role in the government. The following individuals shifted position:

-- (U) Adissu Legesse - Deputy Prime Minister. Chairman and founder of the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) party within the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition, Adissu has been with the government since 1991. He served as Amhara Region president from October 1995 until his appointment as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in October 2001. Adissu will remain Deputy Prime Minister, essentially a ceremonial position, but has been stripped of the Agriculture Ministry portfolio.

-- (SBU) Berhan Hailu - Justice Minister. An ANDM central committee member, Berhan has been with the party since 1991. He served as head of the Information Bureau of the Amhara region from October 2001 until his appointment as Minister of Information in early 2006 replacing Bereket Simon. While many have viewed Berhan's position as Information Minister as merely a token after Bereket's initial May 2005 electoral defeat (he was later re-elected in the opposition-boycotted by-election in August 2005), his appointment may be more an indicator of government dissatisfaction with departing Justice Minister Assefa Kesito over the roll-out and public engagement regarding the contentious draft civil society organizations proclamation.

-- (SBU) Siraj Fegesa - Defense Minister. A Central Committee member of the Southern Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement (SEPDM) within the EPRDF since 2005, Siraj has served as Minister of Federal Affairs since October 2005. Siraj fills the Defense Minister position after a five month vacancy. While Ethiopia watchers had hoped for the appointment of a strong personality to counter the influence of the powerful Chief of Defense Staff Gen. Samora Yunus, the appointment of Siraj suggests business as usual with the military.

-- (U) Hailemariam Desalegne - EPRDF Chief Whip in Parliament. Chairman and Central Committee member of the SEPDM, Hailemariam was an academic and Dean of Arbaminch Water Technology from 1998 until his appointment as president of the Southern Nations Nationalities Peoples' Regional State (SNNPRS) in 2001. He became Public Organization and Participation Advisor to the Prime Minister in October 2005.

-- (U) Demeke Mekonnen - Minister of Education. A Central Committee member of the ANDM, Demeke served as Secretary of the Amhara Region

under Addisu Legesse from 1995 until October 2001. After 2001, he ran the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Bureau in the Amhara region until his appointment as Vice-President of the Amhara Region in October 12005.

-- (U) Junedin Sado - Minister of Science and Technology. A Central Committee member of the Oromo Peoples' Democratic Organization (OPDO) within the EPRDF coalition, Junedin has been a member of OPDO since 1992. He served as President of Oromiya Region from October 2001 until his appointment as Minister of Transport and Communication in October 2005. There is debate as to the meaning of Junedin's move to lead Junedin will be the first Minister to lead the newly -formed Ministry of Science and Technology.

-- (U) Diriba Kuma - Minister of Transport and Communication. An OPDO Central Committee member, Diriba has been the North Shoa Zone Administrator of Oromiya Region until his appointment as Head of the Oromiya regional Agricultural Bureau in October 2005. New to the sector Diriba's portfolio will include the important telecommunications, aviation, and roads sectors.

-- (U) Muferiat Kamil - Minister of Women's Affairs. At the age of 32, Muferiat is the youngest of the newly appointed Ministers. She was born in Jimma from Silte Parents. She Graduated from Haramaya University with BSc. degree in Agriculture in 2000. She worked as the women's Affairs head of Silte Zone, SNNPRS from 2002 until her appointment as Public Relations Advisor to the SNNPR President in 12007. She was transferred to the EPRDF office in Addis Ababa in April 2008 and worked as a junior public relations officer until her recent appointment as Minister of Women's Affairs. She is a member of SEPDM.

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-- (SBU) Tefera Deribew - Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. An ANDM Central Committee member, Tefera has a Master's of Science Degree in Agricultural Economics with 14 years of grass-roots experience in agriculture and rural development. He worked as head of North Gondar Zone Agriculture Department from 1997 until his appointment as head of the Amhara regional Agricultural Bureau in October 2005. The separation of the Agriculture and Rural Development portfolio -- which includes responsibility for humanitarian disasters and relief efforts -- from the less accessible and effective Deputy Prime Minister Adissu, offers grounds for optimism that the Ministry may become more responsive to humanitarian issues. The move also likely indicates a lack of confidence in Adissu for his handling of humanitarian and disaster responses as well as less-than-targeted growth in agricultural productivity.

-- (U) Dr. Shiferaw Tekle-mariam - Minister of Federal Affairs. A Central Committee member of SEPDM, Dr. Shiferaw is an ethnic Hadiya who was appointed as State Minister for Health in April 2007. Prior to his appointment, he served as a member of the House of Federation where he was a member of the Standing Committee on Budget Subsidy and Revenue Affairs. He additionally served as the head of the SNNPRS regional Health Bureau from 2000 until his appointment as State Minister in 2007.

12. (SBU) Assefa Kesito former Justice Minister, Sentayehu Woldemichael former Minister of Education, Shiferaw Jarso former Chief Whip of the EPRDF at the Parliament, and Hirut Delebo, former Women's Affairs Minister now have no role in the government.

13. (SBU) EPRDF Foreign Affairs Department Head Sekutire Getachew informed Pol/Econ Chief on October 31 that in addition to these changes, the government will dissolve the Ministry of Information and re-mold it into a new Ministry of Public Relations. Sekutire confided that former Information Minister and current Public Relations Advisor to the Prime Minister Bereket Simon will be appointed as the first Minister of that to-be-formed Ministry.

COMMENT

14. (SBU) Following the Seventh EPRDF Congress in September, it was

apparent that some members of the cabinet were out of favor. The Prime Minister as well as top leaders of EPRDF were displeased with the lackluster performance of some of the ministries and a reshuffle was anticipated. While the government has maintained the delicate balance among its ethnically-based EPRDF coalition partners, it is notable that none of the core Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) members were affected by the shift. The appointment of new Ministers of Agriculture, Transport and Communication, and Women's Affairs will hopefully breathe new life and responsiveness into those ministries. The injection of new blood will definitely invigorate the performance of the cabinet, but the appointment of very young ministers with little experience is a matter of concern to observers.

YAMAMOTO